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part of *Alcanor* with success. A friend, E. T., wrote to him: "I saw in one paper, Bensley preferred to you in Horatius. I have not seen your Horatius, but I have your *Alcanor*, and I am sure your Horatius must be good."²²

From this time on Cumberland's pen was never idle. During the Summer Season at the Haymarket Theatre was produced *The Country Attorney*. It was withdrawn after the fourth performance. Genest (VI, 452) gives the number of performances of *The Country Attorney* as four, but The Theatrical Register of *The Gentleman's Magazine* records six. The play was never printed, and Cumberland hardly mentions it in the *Memoirs* (II, 278). *The European Magazine* justly calls *The Country Attorney* "one of those hasty productions by which Mr. Cumberland has been gradually writing down his reputation, ever since the appearance of the *West Indian*."²³

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WORDSWORTH BANDIES JESTS WITH MATTHEW

Three stanzas from Wordsworth's poem *The Tables Turned* have always held a very prominent place in the minds of all his readers. They are the following:

Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife:
Come hear the woodland linnet,
How sweet his music! on my life,
There's more of wisdom in it.

And hark! how blithe the throstle sings!
He, too, is no mean preacher:
Come forth into the light of things,
Let Nature be your Teacher.

²² *The European Magazine*, July, 1787. Further comment upon *The Country Attorney* may be found in *The Town and Country Magazine* for July, 1787; *The London Chronicle* of July 9, 1787; Adolphus, *Life of John Bannister*, I, 160; *Memoirs of Mrs. Crouch*, II, 24, 56; and Mudford, p. 547.

²³ *Letters and Poems by the late Mr. John Henderson*, p. 213, E. T. to Henderson, November 13, 1777. Further comment upon *The Arab* may be found in the *Memoirs of Mrs. Crouch*, I, 238.

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

The entire poem, to be sure, but particularly these lines have been regarded as Wordsworth's most concise and memorable expression of his belief in the moral power of Nature. She, and not traditional wisdom, is to be regarded as man's surest ethical guide. Adverse critics of naturalistic morality of this sort, in particular, have fallen foul of this passage. Professor Irving Babbitt, for example, in *Rousseau and Romanticism* says, "Wordsworth . . . would have us believe that man is taught by 'woods and rills' and not by contact with his fellowmen. He pushes this latter paradox to a point that would have made Rousseau stare and gasp when he asserts that 'one impulse from a vernal wood,' etc."

The persistent use of this passage as though it were a direct and formal expression of Wordsworth's philosophy, is hardly justified. The entire poem, as a matter of fact, is essentially dramatic,¹ and helps to form our conception of one of the most original figures in all Wordsworth's poetry. These remarks compose one speech in a little comedy of character which runs through a number of his poems. Properly considered, they form a bit of indirect characterization of an engaging fellow, named Matthew. William, the poet, in them is making a vivacious reply to some teasing to which the old man, in *Expostulation and Reply*, has been subjecting him. William has at length caught the contagion of Matthew's spirit and turns the tables by answering him in just the tone in which he has pitched the argument.

Matthew's character, therefore, must be clearly understood by anyone who hopes to interpret these lines aright. This figure is

¹ Wordsworth, to be sure, in the Advertisement prefixed to the 1793 edition of *The Lyrical Ballads* says "the lines entitled 'Expostulation and Reply,' and those which follow, arose out of conversation with a friend who was somewhat unreasonably attached to books of moral philosophy." This conversation may even conceivably be the inconclusive "metaphysical argument" which Hazlitt records as having had with Wordsworth, in "My First Acquaintance with Poets." These facts, however interpreted, do not affect the nature of the obvious drama which has been built upon them as a base. Certainly no one will seek to find any of Hazlitt's features in Matthew.

an imaginative creation of Wordsworth's,—one of his most distinctive dramatic individuals. He is the central figure in *Matthew*, *The Two April Mornings*, *The Fountain*, and *Address to the Scholars of a Village School*,² besides being the moving spirit of the discussion carried on in *Expostulation and Reply* and *The Tables Turned*.³

This Matthew was built up, as were almost all of Wordsworth's fictions, on a strong basis of actual fact. He doubtless owes many of his most attractive traits to one of his author's teachers at Hawkshead,—The Rev. William Taylor.⁴ But Wordsworth, himself, explicitly warns us against identifying the two. In the Fenwick note to the poem called *Matthew*, the poet, after indicating the relation of its hero to this Taylor, says: "This and other poems connected with Matthew, would not gain by a literal detail of facts. Like the Wanderer in 'The Excursion,' this Schoolmaster was made up of several, both of his class and men of other occupations."

Matthew is conceived as being a merry old schoolmaster of seventy-two,⁵ with hair of glittering gray.⁶ Volatile in the extreme, at frequent intervals he is veritably possessed by mad gaiety. Robertson calls him "the most highly fantastical pedagogue whom we have in all poetic literature." Wordsworth tells us that he was:

As blithe a man as you could see
On a spring holiday.⁷

He calls him "the gray haired man of glee"⁸ and tells us that

² The fact that these poems were all written later than the two directly under discussion, does not weaken their value as supplementary descriptions of the dramatic figure to whom Wordsworth speaks in *The Tables Turned*.

³ I do not include, it will be noticed, lines 531 ff. in *Prelude X*, in which Wordsworth gives an account of a visit to the grave of an old schoolmaster. The person referred to is clearly an historical person, who here shows none of Matthew's distinctive qualities.

⁴ The entire question of the relation of this Matthew to real persons is exhaustively discussed by Eric Robertson in his *Wordsworth and the English Lake Country*, pp. 115-134.

⁵ *The Fountain*, 4.

⁶ *The Two April Mornings*, 6.

⁷ *The Two April Mornings*, 7-8.

⁸ *The Fountain*, 20.

The sighs which Matthew heaved were sighs
Of one tired out with fun and madness;
The tears which came to Matthew's eyes
Were tears of light, the dew of gladness.⁹

His mirth at times overflowed into improvised song. In *The Fountain* at least, the poet suggests that he and Matthew sing together

That half-mad thing of witty rhymes
Which you last April made.

But in the midst of Matthew's seizures of contagious animal gaiety, there would suddenly fall upon him trances of thought.

Yet sometimes, when the secret cup
Of still and serious thought went round,
It seemed as if he drank it up—
He felt with spirit so profound.¹⁰

These ideas, which come to him as suddenly as his moods of joy, have as random and gusty a character as they. A brief study of *The Fountain* will show how little regard he pays to logical consistency when the mood of thought is upon him. As he and the poet are lying near a woodland spring, the latter suggests that they sing together some of his songs. But Matthew does not hear; he is hypnotized by the approach of a thought. When it arrives, he ceases to stare with unseeing eyes at the fountain, and lets the cracle speak through him. Fugitive thoughts pour from his lips. Natural creatures, says the volatile spirit who is talking, enjoy a glorious freedom in comparison to man, who is beset by social laws which precipitate discord within his nature. The blackbird and the lark seem to him free to follow their impulses to natural happiness.

With Nature never do *they* wage
A foolish strife; they see
A happy youth, and their old age
Is beautiful and free.¹¹

But when Matthew comes to mention the heavy laws by which men are oppressed, he seems not to realize that they are laws of Nature to which the gayest birds are subject as inevitably as man. What

⁹ *Matthew*, 17-20.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25-28.

¹¹ *The Fountain*, 41-44.

interests him, however, is that these natural laws of death and loss are indifferent facts to creatures devoid of memory, but are mournful to all men, and most mournful to a man of mirth like him. These wayward and incoherent inspirations of thought, however, produce in him no permanent sense of grief. The feeling proves as evanescent as all his moods, for, a few minutes later, as he and the poet walk away from the fountain, he begins to sing his

Witty rhymes
About the crazy old church-clock
And the bewildered chimes.

In this poem, as in all the others in which he appears, Matthew remains true to his character. He is no person to be taken with sustained seriousness. His thought is harmonious with his conduct; both are delightfully innocent of logic and consistency. Only those who deny Wordsworth even a boyish sense of fun, which took the place in his mind of a sense of humour, will allow their zeal for discovering the poet's philosophy to obscure this spirited characterization of Matthew.

Now when this impulsive old fantastic comes upon the poet idly dreaming on an old gray stone, he attacks him in his now familiar spirit of irresponsible and exaggerated badinage—"Why, William, you sit there mooning and gazing upon the landscape as though you were the first and only one of your kind. Come, get out your books and read them. Then you will learn that there have been great men in the world before you. Let their spirit breathe upon you with inspiration,—that will convert you from an eccentric solitary into a man among men."

Up! Up! and drink the spirit breathed
From dead men to their kind.

The spasmodic philosopher cares little whether or not this doctrine is inconsistent with that enunciated in *The Fountain*. The wide-eyed dreamer arouses one of Matthew's gusts of mad mirth and he takes the line that will give him the most fun.

William is at first so absorbed in his thoughts that he does not enter into the spirit of Matthew's gaiety. So in the last four stanzas of *Expostulation and Reply* he develops seriously and simply his theory of the value of a "wise passiveness" in the presence of Nature. Then he turns, as it were, and for the first time catches

the mirth in Matthew's eyes. He immediately recognizes the jocose spirit of his friend's attack and awaits his opportunity to retaliate. His chance is not long in coming. In the evening he finds Matthew reading, and assails what he is doing with the same spirit of exaggerated ardor¹² that his old friend had shown toward his out-of-door idling.

"Don't preach wisdom to me, my old book-worm. What folly to be bending double over your books when the sun is flooding the meadows with mellow lustre. Close up the barren leaves. Away with Science and Art. Come out and hear the linnet."

How sweet his music! on my life
There's more of wisdom in it.

"Come out into the light and let Nature be your Teacher."

Then follows the mooted stanza:

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

The spirit of this retort, thus put into its proper setting, is unmistakable. William has donned the gay volatility of Matthew for a purpose. He indulges in his friend's irresponsible jesting with idea. How absurd, then, to think that here the poet is giving serious and measured utterance to his cherished ideas. He is beating down a merry adversary by mere exaggeration and volubility.

Wordsworth's attitude toward tradition, books, and wisdom, it must be admitted, is often puzzling, and, to the neo-humanist it must seem sometimes frankly obscurantist. In fact, Wordsworth so often preaches the moral value of mere association with Nature that he might have expressed ideas very like these, as his final wisdom.¹³ But in this poem he is jesting and it is annoying to

¹² Cf. Wordsworth's sub-title to *The Tables Turned*, "An Evening Scene on the Same Subject."

¹³ Especially the lines in *To My Sister*, published, like these two poems, in the first edition of *The Lyrical Ballads*, in particular the following lines:

One moment now may give us more
Than years of toiling reason:
Our minds shall drink at every pore
The spirit of the season.

see one of Wordsworth's few jokes so often taken in deadly earnest. Moreover, it is a pity not to recognize here a flash of sportive and vigorous dramatic ability in this predominantly philosophical poet. Most serious is such a literal-minded critic's loss of this, perhaps the most delightful, encounter which Wordsworth has arranged for his readers, with the old mad-cap Matthew.

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FURTHER INTERPRETATIONS OF MILTON

In my endeavor to meet the doubts of certain scholarly gentlemen as to some of my recent conclusions in the interpretation of Milton, *MLN.* xxxv, 441, facts and considerations have presented themselves which seem to justify further request for the hospitality of these pages.

1. Milton's "star that bids the shepherd fold" (*Comus* 93) is often associated by the annotators with Shakespeare's "unfolding star" (*Meas. for Meas.* iv. ii, 218), and fittingly enough, for they are parts of the same conception. In my former communication I drew attention to the fact that in the Spring the constellation Leo (represented by the bright star Regulus) rises to the zenith as Aries sinks in the west. This suggests poetically the peril that causes the folding of the flock.

The unfolding star is Sirius (Canis Major), perhaps reinforced by Procyon (Canis Minor), which at the same season rises before Aries. Since the lion is the natural enemy of the flock as the dog is its natural protector, the former announces danger, the latter proclaims safety.

2. In the lines *On the Death of a Fair Infant* a more comprehensive view still more positively rejects the bracketed (Mercy) of line 53.

A note in Dr. Thomas Newton's edition (1753) says, "In some editions the title runs thus, *On the Death of a Fair Infant a Nephew of his dying of a cough*; but the sequel shows plainly that the child was not a nephew but a niece and consequently a daughter of his elder sister Anna Milton (Phillips)." But the